



French Basque Country

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Why Go?

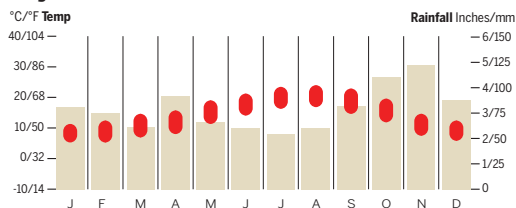
Gently sloping from the foothills of the Pyrenees into the deep-sapphire-blue Bay of Biscay, the Basque Country straddles France and Spain. Yet this feisty, independent land remains profoundly different from either of the nation states that have adopted it.

The Basque Country is famed for the glitzy beach resort of Biarritz, where surfers strut their stuff in the waves, and oiled sun-seekers pack its beaches like glistening sardines. But the region offers so much more than just the pleasures of sun and surf. Nearby Bayonne is a chocolate box of narrow winding streets full of Basque culture, and St-Jean de Luz, further south, is a delightful seaside fishing port.

Inland, up in the lush hills, little one-street villages and green valleys traversed by hiking trails fan out from the walled town of St-Jean Pied de Port, an age-old stop for pilgrims heading over the Spanish border to Santiago de Compostela.

When to Go

Bayonne



May It's chocolate time in Bayonne and the empty beaches and spring flowers of the mountains are all yours.

August The beaches are alive and kicking, and the Fêtes de Bayonne is loud and messy.

September to October Autumnal colours are glorious in the hills, and surf is as good as it gets.

Bayonne

POP 44,200

Surrounded by sturdy fortifications and splashed in red and white paint, Bayonne (Baiona in Basque), capital of the French Basque Country, is one of the most attractive towns in southwest France. Its perfectly preserved old town (until 1907 it was actually forbidden to build outside the town's fortifications) and shoals of riverside restaurants are an absolute delight to explore.

In addition to its chocolates, which you'll see sold throughout France, Bayonne is famous for its prime cured ham and for the *baïonnette* (bayonet), developed here in 1640 on rue des Faures ('Blacksmiths' Street').

The Rivers Adour and Nive split central Bayonne into three: St-Esprit, the area north of the Adour; Grand Bayonne, the oldest and most attractive part of the city, on the western bank of the Nive; and the very Basque Petit Bayonne quarter on the east.

To the west, Bayonne meets the suburban sprawl of Anglet (famed for its beaches, p641) and the glamorous seaside resort of Biarritz.

Sights & Activities

Musée Basque et de l'Histoire de Bayonne

MUSEUM

(www.musee-basque.com, in French; 37 quai des Corsaires; adult/child €5.50/free, with Musée Bonnat €9; ☉10am-6.30pm) The seafaring history, traditions and cultural identity of the Basque people are all explored at this superb museum through exhibits including a reconstructed farm and the interior of a typical *etxe* (home). Labelling is in French, Spanish and Basque only but English information sheets are available. In July and August free 'nocturnal' visits are possible on Wednesday evenings from 6.30pm to 9.30pm.

Musée Bonnat

MUSEUM

(www.museebonnat.bayonne.fr; 5 rue Jacques Lafitte; adult/child €5.50/free, with Musée Basque €9; ☉10am-6.30pm Wed-Mon) Unexpected treasures are crammed into the Musée Bonnat, including canvases by El Greco, Goya, Ingres and Degas, and a roomful of works by Rubens. Nearby is the **Le Carré Musée Bonnat** (9 rue Frédéric Bastiat; admission free), which houses the Bonnat museum's ever-changing collection of works by the Basque artists of today.



French Basque Country Highlights

- 1 Discover the local chocolate at a factory tour in **Bayonne** (p637)
- 2 Tiptoe along the sheer **Iparla Ridge** (p656) in the mist-soaked Pyrenees
- 3 Treat yourself to tapas and watch surfers tackle the waves of magisterial **Biarritz** (p641)
- 4 Taste traditional Basque seafood dishes at **St-Jean de Luz** (p653)
- 5 Browse the farmers market in **St-Jean Pied de Port** (p655)
- 6 Explore picturesque villages **Ainhoa** (p654) and **Espelette** (p654), and chug to the summit of **La Rhune** (p654)
- 7 Soak up some sun on sands of **Hossegor** or **Moliets** in the region of Les Landes (p644)

Cathédrale Ste-Marie

CATHEDRAL

(☉10-11.45am & 3-5.45pm Mon-Sat, 3.30-6pm Sun) The twin towers of Bayonne's Gothic cathedral soar above the city. Construction began in the 13th century, and was completed in 1451; the mismatched materials in some ways resemble Lego blocks.

Above the north aisle are three lovely stained-glass windows; the oldest, in the Chapelle Saint Jérôme, dates from 1531. The entrance to the stately 13th-century **cloister** (☉9am-12.30pm & 2-6pm) is on place Louis Pasteur.

Bayonne

0 0.1 miles 200 m



Ramparts

Bayonne's 17th-century fortifications are now covered with grass, dotted with trees and enveloped in pretty parks. You can walk the stretches of the old ramparts that rise above bd Rempart Lachepaillet and rue Tour de Sault.

PARKS



Festivals & Events

Ham Fair

FOOD FESTIVAL

During Easter week, the town hosts a Ham Fair, honouring *jambon de Bayonne*, the acclaimed local ham. You may think this is just a recently thought up touristy gimmick to sell ham, but no – this fair in March or April has taken place annually since 1462!

Journées du Chocolat

FOOD FESTIVAL

Master chocolatiers reveal the secrets of chocolate making (with tastings) in May.

Fêtes de Bayonne

CULTURAL FESTIVAL

A five-day extravaganza of food, drink, dance and fireworks in early August.



Sleeping

Even outside the Fêtes de Bayonne, it's tough to find a bed from mid-July to mid-August.



Hôtel des Arceaux

BOUTIQUE HOTEL €€

(☎05 59 59 15 53; www.hotel-arceaux.com, in French; 26 rue Port Neuf; d from €79; ♿)

If this hotel, which is located on one of the prettiest streets in the old town, were a pop star it would surely have to be Lady Gaga or some other flamboyant and over-the-top personality. It easily has more flair and character than all the other hotels in Bayonne put together, and is very well run. All the rooms (some of which can accommodate families) are different, so ask to see a few first.

Péniche Djébelle

HOUSEBOAT €€

(☎05 59 25 77 18; www.djebelle.com; face au 17 Quai de Lesseps; d with breakfast €140; ☺closed Oct-Apr) Now here's something really different – can you guess what it is? If you stay here you'll have the best river view in the city, and there's also a chance that you might go to sleep in Bayonne and wake up elsewhere else. Got it yet? Here's a final clue: there's a chance your fellow guests will be mermaids or pirates. Yes, you've guessed it. This unique *chambre d'hôte* is in fact a houseboat floating in the River Ardoir! And don't make the mistake of thinking that just because it's a boat it will be uncomfortable, because it's quite the opposite. The two rooms are immaculate and imaginatively decorated; one has a Moroccan theme and the other, which even has the boat's steering wheel built into the bathroom, is full of thoughts of tropical islands. Advance booking essential.

Bayonne

Top Sights

Cathédrale Ste-Marie	A5
Musée Basque et de l'Histoire de Bayonne	C4
Musée Bonnat	C4

Sights

1 Cloister	A5
2 Le Carré Musée Bonnat	C3

Sleeping

3 Hôtel Côte Basque	D1
4 Hôtel des Arceaux	B3
5 Hôtel Paris-Madrid	D1
6 Le Grand Hôtel	B3
7 Péniche Djébelle	C2

Eating

8 Al Piccola Ristorante	B5
9 Bar-Restaurant du Marché	B5
10 Chiloa Gurmenta Restaurant	C5
11 Covered Market	B5
12 Ibaia	B5

13 La Chayote Restaurant

Bio	A6
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14 La Criée Bayonnaise

C5

15 Le Chisterra

B4

16 Monoprix

B4

17 Xurasko

B5

Drinking

18 Café-Bar Le Patio

C5

19 Cafés Ramuntcho

B5

20 Chai Ramina

B5

21 Massaï Café

C5

Entertainment

22 La Luna Negra

B5

23 L'Autre Cinema

C2

24 Trinquet St-André

C5

Shopping

25 Cazenave

B3

Daranatz

(see 25)

26 Elkar

C5

27 Pierre Ibaialde

C5

FÊTES DE BAYONNE

Beginning on the first Wednesday in August (or occasionally the last in July), the Fêtes de Bayonne attracts up to a million people from across France and Spain for a five-day-long orgy of drinking, dancing, processions, fireworks and bulls. In many ways it's like a less commercialised version of the famous San Fermín festival in Pamplona (Spain) and, just like in Pamplona, Bayonne also indulges in a bit of bull running. However, here the bulls are actually cows – though they still have horns and they still hurt when they mow you down! – and they don't run down the streets, but are instead released on the crowd in front of the Château Neuf. During the *fête*, bullfights take place in the 10,000-seat Les Arènes (tickets from €20; bullfights also take place at other times through the summer; ask at the tourist office for dates and to purchase tickets).

One of the biggest highlights of the *fête* is the opening ceremony, which takes place in front of the Hôtel de Ville at 10pm on the Wednesday night. While the nocturnal activities might be a bit much for children, the daytime processions, marching bands, organised children's picnics and even a children's 'bull' run are tailor-made for the delight of little ones.

If you're planning on attending the *fête*, unless you book at least six to eight months in advance you can give up right now on finding hotel accommodation anywhere in the vicinity of Bayonne. A number of temporary campgrounds (€40 for five days) are erected in and around Bayonne to ease the pressure; otherwise you can just do what most people do and sleep in the back of a car, under a bush or in a pile of vomit (camping outside one of the campgrounds is forbidden). Women would be advised to avoid sleeping rough unless in a group.

Finally, unless you want to stand out like a sore thumb, don't forget to dress all in white with a red sash and neck-scarf. For dates and other *fête* information, see www.fetes.bayonne.fr.

Hôtel Côte Basque

TRADITIONAL HOTEL €

(☎05 59 55 10 21; www.hotel-cotebasque.fr; 2 rue Maubec; r from €65; 🚗🚿) Ride the clanky old-fashioned lift up to your modern room with low-slung beds and colourful art on the walls. Sitting opposite the train station, this recently renovated place offers sizzling value for money. From the end of July to mid-August room rates rise to a minimum of €100.

Hotel Paris-Madrid

TRADITIONAL HOTEL €

(☎05 59 55 13 98; sorbois@wanadoo.fr; place de la Gare; r from €38; 📍) This place, right next to the train station, is a zoo – you'll find crocodiles hanging out behind the reception desk and giraffes sticking their necks into all sorts of unexpected places. It's lively, colourful and oozes character (although the rooms themselves are quite plain and many share bathrooms), and the price is, well, almost unbelievable. For a while now rumours have been floating around that the building is due for demolition to make way for a new high-speed train line (a project that is proving highly unpopular with locals concerned about the environmental damage it's expected to cause). Reservation is by email only.

Le Grand Hôtel

HISTORIC HOTEL €€

(☎05 59 59 62 00; www.legrandhotelbayonne.com; 21 rue Thiers; s/d from €106/111; 🚗🚿🚿) This old building was once a convent, but when they ran out of nuns someone turned it into a hotel. Now its cream-toned, wheelchair-accessible rooms and cosy on-site bar (which probably didn't exist when it was a convent) make this friendly business-class hotel a fine place to rest up. Parking's €13.

Auberge de Jeunesse

HOSTEL €

(☎05 59 58 70 00; www.hibiarritz.org; 19 rte des Vignes, Anglet; dm incl breakfast €19, camping incl breakfast €12; ☀reception 8.30am-12.30pm & 6-10pm, closed early Nov-Mar; 📍) In the nearby beach suburb of Anglet, this hostel has reached legendary status for its nonstop international party scene. To keep people well oiled, it comes complete with a basement Scottish pub screening surf films. From the Mairie de Bayonne (Town Hall) bus stop, take bus 7 (C on Sunday and public holidays) to the stop for Les Sables, from where it's a 500m uphill walk. Alternatively, you can catch that bus from Biarritz train station to the Auberge de Jeunesse stop. You


have to be an HI member to stay (you can sign up on arrival).

Eating

Bayonne has some superb places to eat and costs are generally much lower than in nearby Biarritz. Restaurants proliferate around the covered market and nearby quai Amiral Jauréguiberry, as well as quai Galupierie and quai des Corsaires across the River Nive.



Chiloea Gurmenta Restaurant

BASQUE €

(7 rue des Tonneliers; menu/mains €12.50/10; ) As Basque as a game of *pelota*, this simple and rustic little restaurant, located inside a former brothel, serves one thing and one thing only: *axoa*. A Basque farmers' dish, *axoa* originates from the nearby village of Espelette and consists of minced veal with Espelette peppers, rice, potato and whatever else is lying around. Anne, your host for the evening, could work in show business.



Al Piccola Ristorante

ITALIAN €€

(05 59 59 54 87; 63 rue d'Espagne; mains €12; lunch Mon-Sat) Every lunchtime a queue of hopefuls forms at the door of this minute restaurant that's essentially just someone's front room. The reward for all that waiting are the beautifully crafted, homemade Italian dishes that'll leave you feeling like you're living *la dolce vita*. If you don't want to join the hopefuls at the door, book ahead.

Bar-Restaurant du Marché



BASQUE €

(05 59 59 22 66; 39 rue des Basques; menu/mains €13/7.50; lunch Mon-Sat) Run by a welcoming Basque-speaking family, this unpretentious place is an absolute institution where everyone knows everyone (and there-

fore some people may find it slightly intimidating, but don't worry; just dive right in – nobody cares!) and simple but ample home-cooked dishes full of the flavours of the neighbouring market are dished up to all comers.

La Crée Bayonnaise

SEAFOOD €€

(05 59 59 56 60; 14 quai Chaho; menus from €15, mains €13-15; lunch Mon-Sat, dinner Tue-Sat) Decked out in marine colours, this unassuming little find does delicious Basque seafood specialities (such as *les chipirons à l'espagnole* – squid with sweet peppers served with finely ground rice), but you can also get fresh mussels and even fish and chips. For dessert, don't miss the *ardi gasna* (local cheese with cherry jam).



Restaurant Agadir

MOROCCAN €€

(05 59 55 66 56; 3 rue Ste-Catherine; menu €15, mains €9-15; closed lunch Mon) Shimmering with red and gold, this St-Esprit restaurant serves up mountains of Moroccan-style couscous and steaming tagines.




Le Chisterra

BASQUE €€


(05 59 59 25 93; 42 rue Port Neuf; mains €10-16; lunch Tue-Sun, dinner Thu-Sun) A local gathering spot, this aromatic, traditional Basque place is named for the *chisterra* (basket) that *pelota* players strap to their wrists. It's decorated with motifs from the sport, thanks to two generations of owners who are former professional players.

La Chayote Restaurant Bio

VEGETARIAN €

(9 rue d'Espagne; menu €13; lunch Mon-Sat;  ) A relaxed child-friendly *bio* (organic) café that serves primarily homemade vegetarian fare, although one or two chicken dishes slip in to keep the carnivores happy.

BAYONNE CHOCOLATE

Bayonne's long association with chocolate stems from the Spanish Inquisition, when Jews who fled Spain set up their trade in the St-Esprit neighbourhood. By 1870 Bayonne boasted 130 chocolatiers (specialist makers of chocolate), more than in all of Switzerland. Today, 11 are still in business, including **Daranatz** (15 rue Port Neuf) and the 19th-century **Cazenave** (19 rue Port Neuf), which does a sublime *chocolat mousseaux* (rich hot chocolate; €5.50). You can see chocolate being made at **L'Atelier du Chocolat** (www.atelierduchocolat.fr, in French; 1 allée de Gibélou; adult/child €6/3; 9.30am-6.30pm Mon-Sat), including a historical overview of chocolate in Bayonne and, of course, tastings.

Tastings are also the highlight of the weekend-long **Journées du Chocolat** each May, when master chocolatiers set up the tools of their craft in front of their shops.

For more chocolate heaven, pop by the Planète Musée du Chocolat in Biarritz (p643).

Basque Culture

Call a Basque French or Spanish and it's almost certain you'll receive a glare and a stern 'I'm Basque!' in return. The Basques have over time developed a culture unique in Europe.

The regional game is *pelote Basque* (*pelota*) and you'll notice every village has its own court – normally backing up against the village church. *Pelota* is actually the generic name for a group of 16 different native Basque ball games, but the most well known has players using a scooplike basket called a *chistera*. Some players are able to throw the ball at speeds of up to 300km/h.

Throughout France the Basques are also famous for their festivals. Some, like La Fête du Thon in St-Jean de Luz (p648), celebrate the region's superlative food. Others, such as the Fêtes de Bayonne (p636), simply celebrate the Basques' sheer joy for life.

Basque festivals are also a good opportunities to see traditional Basque dress. It's said that there are around 400 different Basque dances, many of which require their own special kind of outfit.

But perhaps the most visible symbol of Basque culture is the *lauburu*, also known as the Basque cross and regarded as a symbol of prosperity. It's also used to signify life and death.

TOP BASQUE EATS

- » **Piment d'Espelette** This little chilli pepper is an essential accompaniment to many a Basque meal.
- » **Fromage des Pyrénées** Cheese – buy it fresh, straight from a shepherd. The best-known cheese is Ossau-Iraty.
- » **Jambon de Bayonne** Wafer-thin ham has a fair devoted to it (p635).
- » **Axoa** Classic dish – try it at Bayonne's Chiloa Gurmenta Restaurant (p637).
- » **Bayonne chocolate** The best chocolate shops in the country (p637).

Clockwise from top left

1. *Pelote Basque* in action **2.** Crowds at the Fêtes de Bayonne **3.** Gathering at Les Arènes, Bayonne

HEMIS/ALAMY



1

HEMIS/ALAMY



3



After eating, slide through the side door to the neighbouring *bio* supermarket.

Self-Catering

The **covered market** (quai Commandant Roquebert) sits on the riverfront. There are a number of tempting food shops and delicatessens along rue Port Neuf and rue d'Espagne. Pick up staples at **Monoprix** (8 rue Orbe).



Drinking

Petit Bayonne is awash with pubs and bars (all generally open from noon to 2am, Monday to Saturday), especially along rue Pannecau, rue des Cordeliers and quai Galuperie.

Chai Ramina

BAR

(11 rue Poissonnerie) In fine weather, rue Poissonnerie is completely blocked by the huge crowds spilling out of Chai Ramina.

Café-Bar Le Patio

BAR

(38 rue Pannecau) Another lively night-time spot.

Massaï Café

BAR

(14 rue des Cordeliers) The place to sip cocktails on rue des Cordeliers.

Cafés Ramuntcho

TEAROOM

(9 rue du Pilon) To sip (or buy to take home) no fewer than 380 different teas (reputedly the most in France), take a seat amid the metal canisters of this café, established in 1920.



Entertainment

Upcoming cultural events are listed in *l'Affiche* and the trimestrial *Les Saisons de la Culture*, both available free at the tourist office. Every Thursday in July and August, there's traditional **Basque music** (admission

free; ☎9.30pm) in place Charles de Gaulle. Between October and June **Trinquet St-André** (rue des tonneliers; tickets around €9) stages *main nue pelota* matches every Thursday at 4.30pm.

L'Autre Cinéma

CINEMA

(3 quai Sala) Along with its sister cinema, **Cinéma l'Atalante** (www.cinema-atalante.org, in French; 7 rue Denis Etcheverry), L'Autre screens art-house nondubbed films. Both cinemas are in the St-Esprit neighbourhood.

La Luna Negra

MUSIC

(www.lunanegra.fr; in French; rue des Augustins; ☎7pm-2am Wed-Sat) Catch live jazz, salsa and tango evenings and concerts of world music at this alternative cabaret/theatre venue.



Shopping

For chocolate, head to Daranatz or Caze-nave on rue Port Neuf.

Pierre Ibañalde

FOOD

(41 rue des Cordeliers) To buy Bayonne's famous ham at the lowest prices, visit the covered market or, for the best quality, visit a specialist shop such as Pierre Ibañalde, where you can taste before you buy.

Elkar

BOOKS

(place de l'Arsenal) Elkar has a wealth of books and films on Basque history and culture, walking in the Basque Country, maps and CDs of Basque music.



Information

There are several internet cafés in the streets around the train station.

Post office (11 rue Jules Labat & 21 bd Alsace-Lorraine)

A TASTE OF SPAIN

You know you're getting close to the border when tapas start cropping up. Bayonne has an increasing number of *pintxo* (tapas in Basque) bars and in some the quality is every bit as good as the legendary *pintxo* bars of San Sebastián, just over the border in Spain. Two of the best are the bar bodegas **Xurasko** (16 rue Poissonnerie; pintxos from €2.50) and **Ibaia** (45 quai Amiral Jauréguiberry; raciones from €8; ☎closed Sun & Mon Oct-Mar). Tapas start to decorate the bar like little flowers at Xurasko from 7pm and as everyone clocks off work they stop by for a glass of wine and some choice titbits. The golden rule of tapas is to just take one or two (which you pay for when you leave) before moving on to try those elsewhere – only tourists pile their plates up and scoff loads of them! And when you do move on from Xurasko you'd best go straight to Ibaia, which, with hams swinging from hooks in the ceiling and a garlic-heavy atmosphere, is a Bayonne legend. Here the emphasis is more on larger plates of hot tapas such as garlic prawns and spicy chorizo sausages, which you order off a blackboard menu. One plate is often enough for two people.

Tourist office (☎08 20 42 64 64; www.bayonne-tourisme.com; place des Basques; ☀9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun) Efficient, friendly office providing stacks of informative brochures and free bike rental, plus guided city tours (by appointment only; from €100 for any group of less than 20).

i Getting There & Away

Air

Biarritz-Anglet-Bayonne airport (☎05 59 43 83 83; www.biarritz.aeroport.fr) is 5km south-west of central Bayonne and 3km southeast of the centre of Biarritz. It's served by low-cost carriers including EasyJet and Ryanair, as well as Air France, with daily domestic flights and flights to the UK, and regular flights to Ireland, Finland, Switzerland and Holland.

Bus 6 links both Bayonne and Biarritz with the airport (€1.20, buses depart roughly hourly). A taxi from the town centre costs around €15 to €20.

Bus

From place des Basques, **ATCRB buses** follow the coast to the Spanish border. There are nine services daily to St-Jean de Luz (€3, 40 minutes) with connections for Hendaye (€3, one hour). Summer beach traffic can double journey times. **Transportes Pesa** (www.pesa.net) buses leave twice a day Monday to Saturday for Bilbao (€18.50) in Spain, calling by Biarritz, St-Jean de Luz, Irún and San Sebastián (€8.50).

From the train station, **RDTL** (www.rdtl.fr, in French) runs services northwards into Les Landes including Capbreton/Hossegor (€2, 40 minutes, six or seven daily).

Car & Motorcycle

All the big car-rental agencies are represented at the airport; otherwise, close to the train station is **Avis** (www.avis.fr; 1 rue Ste-Ursule).

Train

TGVs run between Bayonne and Paris Gare Montparnasse (€97, five to six hours, eight daily).

There are five trains daily to St-Jean Pied de Port (€9, 1¼ hours) and fairly frequent services to St-Jean de Luz (€4.50, 25 minutes) via Biarritz (€2.50, nine minutes), plus the French and Spanish border towns of Hendaye (€7, 40 minutes) and Irún (from €7, 45 minutes). For travel between Bayonne and Biarritz, however, buses are cheaper and more frequent.

Other services:

Bordeaux from €28, two hours, at least 10 daily

Pau €16, 1¼ hours, nine daily

Toulouse from €40, 3¾ hours, five daily

i Getting Around

BICYCLE Bayonne's tourist office lends out bikes for free (not overnight); you simply need to leave some ID as a deposit.

BUS STAB buses link Bayonne, Biarritz and Anglet. A single ticket costs €1.20, while *carnets* of five/10 are €5/9.50. Timetables are available from STAB's **information office** (www.bus-stab.com, in French; place du Gaulle). Buses 1 and 2 run between Bayonne and Biarritz about 50 times daily, stopping at the *hôtels de ville* (town halls) and stations of both towns. No 1, which runs every 15 minutes until 8.30pm, is the fastest and most frequent. A free bright-orange *navette* (shuttle bus) loops around the heart of town.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE There's free parking along the southern end of av des Allées Paulmy, within easy walking distance of the tourist office.

TAXI Call **Taxi Bayonne** (☎05 59 59 48 48)

Biarritz

POP 30,700

As ritzy as its name suggests, this stylish coastal town, 8km west of Bayonne, took off as a resort in the mid-19th century when Napoléon III and his Spanish-born wife, Eugénie, visited regularly. Along its rocky coastline are architectural hallmarks of this golden age, and the belle-époque and art deco eras that followed. Although it retains a high glamour quotient (and high prices to match), it's also a magnet for vanloads of surfers, with some of Europe's best waves.

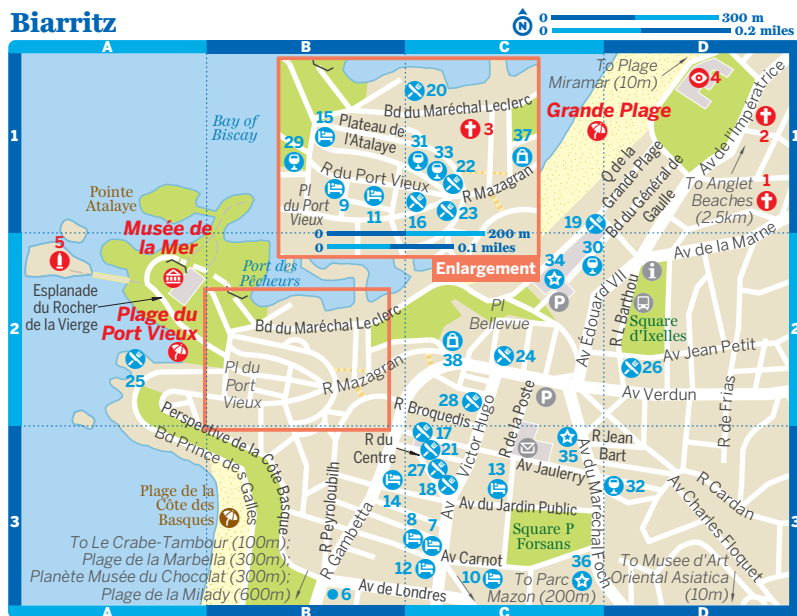
📍 Sights & Activities

Beaches

BEACHES

Biarritz' *raison d'être* is its fashionable beaches, particularly the two central **Grande Plage** and **Plage Miramar**, which are lined end to end with sunbathing bodies on hot summer days. Stripy 1920s-style **beach tents** can be hired for €9.50 per day. The other central Biarritz beach is the tiny cove of **Plage du Port Vieux** which, thanks to its lack of swell, is the best one for young children to splash about on. North of Pointe St-Martin, the adrenaline-pumping surfing beaches of **Anglet** (the final 't' is pronounced) continue northwards for more than 4km. Take eastbound bus 9 (line C on Sunday and public holidays) from the bottom of av Verdun (just near av Édouard VII).

To the south, beyond the long, exposed **Plage de la Côte des Basques**, some 500m



Biarritz

Top Sights

- Grand Plage C1
Musée de la Mer A2
Plage du Port Vieux A2

Sights

- 1 Chapelle Impériale D1
2 Église Alexandre Newsky D1
3 Église Ste-Eugénie C1
4 Hôtel du Palais D1
5 Rocher de la Vierge A2

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south of Port Vieux, are **Plage de Marbella** and **Plage de la Milady**. Take westbound bus 9 from rue Gambetta where it crosses rue Broquedis.

Musée de la Mer

AQUARIUM

(www.museedelamer.com; Esplanade du Rocher de la Vierge; adult/child €8/5.50; ☉9.30am-midnight) Housed in a wonderful art deco building, Biarritz' Musée de la Mer is seething with underwater life from the Bay of Biscay and beyond, as well as exhibits on fishing recalling Biarritz' whaling past. It's the seals that steal the show though (feeding time, which is always a favourite with children, is at 10.30am and 5pm). In high season it's possible to have the place almost to yourself by visiting late at night.

Arty art deco

ARCHITECTURE

From art deco mansions to Russian Orthodox churches and 1970s tower-block disasters, Biarritz has a fantastic potpourri of architectural styles. If the swell's big, you might get a drenching as you cross the footbridge at the end of Pointe Atalaye to **Rocher de la Vierge** (Rock of the Virgin), named after its white statue of the Virgin and child. Views from this impressive outcrop extend to the mountains of the Spanish Basque Country.

The tiny fishing port of **Port des Pêcheurs** is an atmospheric place for a drink or a meal. Above it, the neo-Gothic **Église Ste-Eugénie** was built in the late 1800s for – who else? – Empress Eugénie.

Dominating the northern end of the Grande Plage is the 19th-century **Hôtel du Palais**, also built for Empress Eugénie and now a luxury hotel. Opposite is **Église Alexandre Newsky** (8 av de l'Impératrice), a Russian Orthodox church built by and for the Russian aristocrats who frequented Biarritz until the Soviet Revolution. Eugénie was also the inspiration for the nearby doll's-house-sized **Chapelle Impériale** (☉3-7pm Tue, Thu & Sat), constructed in 1864.

Climbing the 258 twisting steps inside the 73m-high **Phare de Biarritz** (admission €2.50; ☉10am-12.30pm & 2.30-7pm), the town's 1834 lighthouse, rewards you with sweeping views of the Basque coast.

Musée d'Art Oriental Asiatique

ART MUSEUM

(www.museeasiatica.com; 1 rue Guy Petit; admission €7; ☉10.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 2-7pm Sat-Sun) Out on the edge of town is this unexpected treasure trove of ancient Indian, Chinese and Tibetan statues, monu-

ments and temple artwork. The layout is a bit haphazard, but the information cards (in several languages) clearly explain the significance of the objects. It's generally considered the finest collection of its type outside Paris.

Surfing

SURF COURSES

Once the almost exclusive haunt of the rich and pampered, Biarritz is now known more as the capital of European surfing (although in truth, the real centre of European surfing is the small town of Hossegor around 25km to the north). **Grande Plage** itself is good from mid-low tide on a moderate swell, whereas the 4km-long stretch of beaches that make up **Anglet** are more consistent and generally better.

No fewer than a dozen places around town offer gear and lessons (from €35 per hour); the tourist office keeps a list of most of the surf schools. You should ensure that the school you choose is registered with the Fédération Française de Surf (FFS; www.surfingfrance.com, in French) as some of those not registered with the FFS are slightly fly-by-night operators whose staff may have only a little more surf knowledge than the pupils. Even with the registered schools, the instructors often seem to use the lessons merely as an excuse to go surfing themselves.

Planète Musée du Chocolat

CHOCOLATE MUSEUM

(www.planetemuseeduchocolat.com; 14 av Beau Rivage; adult/child €6/4; ☉10am-12.30pm & 2.30-6.30pm Mon-Sat) Delve into this real-life *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* for an indulgent exploration through the world of chocolate, from its earliest beginnings to the mass production of today.



Festivals & Events

Major surfing competitions take place year-round.

Biarritz Maider Arosteguy

SURFING

A three-day surfing championship is held at Easter.

Festival des Arts de la Rue

CULTURAL FESTIVAL

Performance artists take to the streets for five days in early May.

Roxy Jam

SURFING

(www.roxyjam.com) A major female longboarding championship on the ASP (Association of Surfing Professionals) circuit, with spin-off events like concerts, held over five days in mid-July.

BEACHES OF LES LANDES

North of Bayonne is the *département* of Les Landes, a vast semiwilderness of pine forests and lakes. This whole area has a special kind of wild beauty, criss-crossed with excellent cycling and walking trails; maps and route suggestions are available from most tourist offices. The trails are broken up by numerous lakes, the best being at **Soustons** and the small village of **Léon**, with opportunities for windsurfing, canoeing and other water sports. But for most people, the reason to visit Les Landes is its beaches. From the mouth of the Adour at Anglet north to Arcachon and beyond to the mouth of the Gironde stretches a ribbon of shimmering golden sand backed by dunes and basking under a deep-blue sky.

Above all else, this is surf country. Towns such as the twin centres of **Capbreton** and **Hossegor** now owe their existence to surfing. Capbreton, which still retains some life beyond the waves, is easily the more appealing of the two and its small port supplies the town's numerous seafood restaurants with delicious fresh fish.

Chez Du Camp (☎05 58 72 11 33; 4 rue Port d'Albert; menus €28-38, mains €16) is one of the best places in town to indulge. You can sit at a table overlooking ocean-sized tanks swimming with the imminent contents of your dinner. Or, even better, pick from a mix of prawns, mussels, crab, squid and whatever else the boats brought in that morning, get it all cooked up on the spot and then take it away to have as a picnic.

Brash Hossegor, no more than a kilometre north of Capbreton, is renowned for having some of the best beach break waves in the world (see p645), but it has to be said that this reputation has made it the very definition of a 'hey, dude' surf town, where if you're not wearing the right pair of sunglasses or T-shirt you're just not going to be welcome at the party. On the plus side, the beaches here are breathtaking and they only get better the further north towards the village of Seignosse you go. For eating you won't do better than **La Tétrade** (☎05 58 43 51 48; 1187 av du Touring Club de France; weekday lunch menus €19.40, other times €28-33). Set on the banks of Hossegor's lake, it offers the kind of view to get married to, and a shellfish and seafood menu you'd also marry if you could.

But for the best beach of all, one that's up there with the best in France, you have to continue north another 20 minutes to the tiny seasonal village of **Moliets**. The vast beach here, which sits at the mouth of a sluggish and inky-coloured river known as the **Courant d'Huchet**, has sand that sparkles like diamonds and is soft as feathers, while the river itself provides safe bathing for children.

Unfortunately, most of the limited hotel accommodation in this region is seriously poor value and most visitors end up camping at one of the dozens of campgrounds that litter the coast. Local tourist offices can supply details.

Le Temps d'Aimer

DANCE FESTIVAL

A two-week celebration of dance in all its forms is held in mid-September.



Sleeping

Inexpensive hotels are a rarity in Biarritz, and any kind of room is at a premium in July and August. Outside the high season, however, most prices fall by a good 25%.



Hôtel Mirano

BOUTIQUE HOTEL €€

(☎05 59 23 11 63; www.hotelmirano.fr, in French; 11 av Pasteur; d €100-110, ste €140) Squiggly purple, orange and black wallpaper and oversize orange perspex light fittings are some of the rad '70s touches at

this boutique retro hotel, a 10-minute stroll from the town centre. The staff go above and beyond the call of duty in order to please. Oh, and there's a flirty Betty Boop bursting out of her top in the bar! All up, this eccentrically stylish place offers one of the best deals in town. To get there take the D910 southeast out of town, turn left onto av de Grammont and right onto av Pasteur. It's a good 10-minute walk from the centre.

Villa le Goëland

HISTORIC HOTEL €€€

(☎05 59 24 25 76; www.villagoeland.com; 12 plateau de l'Atalaye; r from €170; ☎) This stunning family home with its château-like spires perched high on a plateau above Pointe

Atalaye is one of the most notable buildings in town. Rooms, tastefully furnished with antiques, family photos and mementos, have panoramic views of the town, sea and across to Spain. There are only four rooms (opt for *chambre Goëland* with its huge 35-sq-metre private terrace; €250), so advance booking is essential.

Hôtel Édouard VII

HISTORIC HOTEL €€

(☎05 59 22 39 80; www.hotel-edouardvii.com; 21 av Carnot; d from €118; 🍷🍴) From the ornate dining room full of gently tick-tocking clocks to the pots of lavender carefully colour coordinated to match the floral wallpaper, everything about this beautiful and intimate hotel screams 1920s Biarritz chic.

Maison Garnier

BOUTIQUE HOTEL €€

(☎05 59 01 60 70; www.hotel-biarritz.com; 29 rue Gambetta; r from €115) The seven boutique 'rooms' (suites would be a better description) of this elegant mansion are tastefully decorated and furnished in cool, neutral tones; those up at attic level are especially romantic. A seriously decent breakfast costs an extra €11.

Hôtel les Alizés

BOUTIQUE HOTEL €

(☎05 59 24 11 74; www.alizes-biarritz.com; 13 rue du Port Vieux; s/d/ste €62/90/179; 🍷) With its brash and blushing shades clashing brilliantly with the old-fashioned desks and

wardrobes, this funky family-run hotel is one of the more memorable cheapies in town. Its position, just back from the cute Plage du Port Vieux, is spot on.

Hôtel Maitagaria

TRADITIONAL HOTEL €€

(☎05 59 24 26 65; www.hotel-maitagaria.com; 34 av Carnot; s/d €72/83) Overlooking the park, the spotless modern rooms with art deco furniture, leopard-print furnishings and immaculate bathrooms make this friendly place good value. Not least of its charms is its summer terrace opening off the comfy guest lounge, which is warmed in winter by a toasty open fire.

Hôtel St-Julien

TRADITIONAL HOTEL €€

(☎05 59 24 20 39; www.saint-julien-biarritz.com, in French; 20 av Carnot; d €120-130; 🍷) A bright shuttered facade graces this attractive late-19th-century villa, with original parquet flooring inside. Third-floor rooms have views of both mountains and sea. Its undoubted quality means it fills quickly. English is spoken.

Hôtel Palym

TRADITIONAL HOTEL €

(☎05 59 24 16 56; 7 rue du Port Vieux; r with toilet €40, r with bathroom €45-58; ☀mid-Jan–mid-Nov) This welcoming 20-room, family-run place occupies a brightly painted town house on a street packed with hotels. Bedrooms, on the floors above the family's bustling restaurant,

TOP SURF SPOTS – BASQUE & ATLANTIC COASTS

France's Basque and Atlantic coasts have some of Europe's best surf. Autumn is prime time, with warm(ish) water temperatures, consistently good conditions and few(er) crowds. The big-name spots are Biarritz and Hossegor (p644), where you can watch Kelly Slater and friends battle it out for crucial world-title points in dredging Gravière barrels during September's **ASP** (Association of Surfing Professionals; www.aspeurope.com) event. In fact, almost anywhere between St-Jean de Luz in the south and Soulac-sur-Mer up in the north by the mouth of the Gironde River has mighty good surf.

Europe's original big wave spot might have been surpassed by bigger and nastier discoveries, but the reef breaks around **Guéthary**, just to the south of Biarritz, retain a special sense of magic.

Take a lesson in the mellow waves at **Hendaye**, just to the south of St-Jean de Luz, where the small, gently breaking waves are tailor-made for learners. The **tourist office** (☎05 59 20 00 34; www.hendaye-tourisme.fr; 67 bd de la Mer; ☀9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm & 3.30-6pm Sun) can point you in the right direction. Beginners lessons start at €30 to €35.

Paddle out from the tip of pine-forested **Cap Ferret** peninsula (p630), or go on surfari to the magnificent beaches around **Lacanau**, where the surfers of Bordeaux get their kicks.

And for the best waves away from the coast, longboarders can attempt the **mas-care** (<http://mascaretgironde.free.fr>), a tidal-bore wave travelling inland from the Gironde Estuary. The best place to pick it up is St-Pardon during spring tides

THALASSOTHERAPY

Thalassotherapy ('sea healing'), using the restorative properties of seawater (along with seaweed and mud), has been popular in Biarritz since the late 18th century and continues to serve as an antidote to 21st-century ailments such as stress and insomnia.

In Biarritz, put thalassotherapy's curative powers to the test – or simply bliss out – at the following:

Spa Kémana (☎05 59 22 12 13; www.kemana.fr, in French; 3 carrefour Hélianthe)

Thalassa Biarritz (☎08 25 82 55 28; www.accorthalassa.com; 11 rue Louison-Bobet)

Thermes Marins (☎08 25 12 64 64; www.biarritz-thalasso.com; 80 rue de Madrid)

are colourful, though the bathrooms are a squeeze.

La Maison du Lierre BOUTIQUE HOTEL €€€
(☎05 59 24 06 00; www.maisondulierre.com; 3 av du Jardin Public; r €56-139; ☎) This establishment is a bit of a mixed bag. The cheaper rooms are very small and disappointing, with openly exposed toilets, but for the price you can't complain too much. Go for one of the more expensive ones, though, and you're in for a treat. These rooms are exquisitely decorated with polished floors, gorgeous fabrics and garden views. Sadly, the hotel is let down somewhat by some less-than-welcoming staff.

Hôtel Gardènia TRADITIONAL HOTEL €
(☎05 59 24 10 46; www.hotel-gardenia.com; 19 av Carnot; s €49-66, d €49-76; ☎) One of the cheapest options in Biarritz; the rooms with attached bathrooms are fairly poky but brightly painted. For rugby fans, this is the only place to stay due to the common areas being decked out in memorabilia for Biarritz Olympique, the town's rugby club and one of the top teams in France.

Auberge de Jeunesse de Biarritz HOSTEL €
(☎05 59 41 76 00; www.hibiarritz.org; 8 rue Chiquito de Cambo; dm incl sheets & breakfast €19.50; ☎reception 8.30-11.30am & 6-9pm, closed mid-Dec-early Jan; ☎☎) Like Anglet's youth hostel, this popular place offers outdoor activities including surfing. Rooms for two to four hostellers have an en suite. From the train station, follow the railway westwards for 800m.

Biarritz Camping CAMPGROUND €
(☎05 59 23 00 12; www.biarritz-camping.fr; 28 rue d'Harcet; 2 people and tent €24; ☎mid-May-mid-Sep; ☎) This campground, 2km southwest of the centre, has spacious, shady pitches. Take westbound bus 9 to the Biarritz Camping stop.

Eating

See-and-be-seen cafés and restaurants line Biarritz' beachfront. Anglet's beaches are also becoming increasingly trendy, with cafés strung along the waterfront.

Casa Juan Pedro SEAFOOD €
(☎05 59 24 00 86; Port des Pêcheurs; mains €5-15) Down by the old port, which is something of a hidden little village of wooden fishing cottages and old-timers, is this cute little fishing-shack restaurant. The gregarious atmosphere ensures that you can wash down your tuna, sardines or squid with plenty of friendly banter from both the staff and other customers. There are several similar neighbouring places.

Le Crabe-Tambour SEAFOOD €€
(☎05 59 23 24 53; 49 rue d'Espagne; lunch menu €13, dinner menus from €18) Named after the famous 1977 film of the same name (the owner was the cook for the film set), this friendly local place, a little way out of the centre, offers great seafood for a price that is hard to fault. The prawns in garlic are particularly good.

Bistrot des Halles BASQUE €€
(☎05 59 24 21 22; 1 rue du Centre; menu €27) One of a cluster of decent restaurants along rue du Centre that get their produce directly from the nearby covered market, this bustling place serves excellent fish and other fresh fare from the blackboard menu in an interior adorned with old metallic advertising posters.

Le Clos Basque BASQUE €€
(☎05 59 24 24 96; 12 rue Louis Barthou; menus €24; ☎lunch Tue-Sun, dinner Tue-Sat) With its tiles and exposed stonework hung with abstract art, this tiny place could have strayed in from Spain. The cuisine, however, is emphatically Basque, traditional

with a contemporary twist or two, such as sirloin with green mustard, or stuffed eggplant with saffron. Reserve ahead to secure a terrace table.

Bleu Café

LIGHT MEALS €

(☎05 59 22 34 53; Grand Plage; pasta €8-9; ☉9am-midnight) It might be a cliché but nothing really beats plonking yourself down on the beachfront terrace here and watching the waves roll in while sipping a morning coffee, evening sundowner or tucking into one of the light lunches.

Crêperie

CRÊPERIE €

(22 rue Mazagran; galettes €1.80-6; 🍴) The simple name reveals a simple *crêperie*-cum-snack-bar where you can either settle down in one of the stalls and chat away to the lovely owner or take away for a beachside picnic. It's open all day.

Self-Catering

You'll find a picnic hamper of fresh ingredients at the **covered market** and a tempting array of cheeses, wines and pâtés at nearby **Mille et Un Fromages** (8 av Victor Hugo). At sea level, **Épicerie Fine du Port Vieux** (41bis rue Mazagran) is another excellent delicatessen.

There's a good-sized supermarket in the basement of the **Galeries Lafayette** (17 place Clemenceau) department store.



Drinking

There are some great bars on and around rue du Port Vieux, place Clemenceau and the central food-market area. Places generally open from 11am to 2am unless noted otherwise.



Miremont

CAFÉ €

(1bis place Georges-Clemenceau; tea & cake €7-9; ☉9am-8pm) Operating since 1880, this grande dame of a place harks back to the time when belle-époque Biarritz was simply the beach resort of choice for the rich and glamorous of Europe. Today it still attracts perfectly coiffured hairdos (and that's just on the poodles) but the somewhat less chic are also now welcome to come and partake of a fine selection of teas, cakes and views over the bay.

Ventilo Caffé

BAR €

(rue du Port Vieux; ☉closed Tue low season) Dressed up like a boudoir, this fun and funky place continues its domination of the Biarritz bar scene.

Arena Café Bar

BAR €

(Plage du Port Vieux; ☉9am-2am, closed Mon & Tue Oct-Mar) Tucked into a tiny cove, this beachfront hang-out combines a style-conscious restaurant (mains €15 to €22) with a fuchsia- and violet-tinged bar with DJs on the turntables.

Milk Bar

BAR €

(17 bd du Général-de-Gaulle; ☉closed Mon) If you're on the hunt for a surfer or a surfer at heart, then this place, just back from the beach, provides plenty of opportunities to get your sex wax out.

Red Bar

BAR €

(9 av du Maréchal Foch; ☉Tue-Sun) You mightn't think a rugby bar would attract trendsetters, but this temple to Biarritz Olympique (their colours are red and white – hence the name), with reggae and '70s rock in the background, will make you think again.



Entertainment

Free classical-music concerts take place in high summer at various atmospheric outdoor venues around town; the tourist office has the program.

Cinéma Le Royal

CINEMA

(8 av du Maréchal Foch) Screens a good selection of nondubbed films.

Casino Municipal

CASINO

(1 av Édouard VII) Constructed in 1928, Biarritz' landmark casino has 200-plus fruit machines that whirr and chink until the wee hours.

Fronton Couvert Plaza Berri

SPORT

(42 av du Maréchal Foch) *Pelota* matches are held virtually year-round; ask the tourist office for schedules.

Parc Mazon

SPORT

From July to mid-September, the open-air *fronton* (*pelota* court) has regular *chistera* matches at 9pm on Thursdays.

Euskal-Jai

SPORT

(av Henri Haget) Regular professional *cesta punta* matches (admission €10 to €20) are held at 9pm at the Parc des Sports d'Aguiléra Complex, 2km east of central Biarritz, between mid-June and mid-September. Bus 1 stops nearby.



Shopping

Pare Gabia

SHOES

(18 rue Mazagran) Vincent Corbun continues his grandfather's business, established in 1935, making and selling espadrilles in a

TAPAS ON THE SEASHORE

Like neighbouring Bayonne, there's a growing number of tapas bars in Biarritz. The area around the covered market, Les Halles, is a real hot spot for character-infused joints with bar tops that are positively loaded with tasty treats. The following spots are our favourites.

Bar Jean (5 rue des Halles; tapas €1-2) The most original, and delicious, selection of tapas in the city is served up with a flamenco soundtrack and a backdrop of blue and white Andalusian tiles. Try the calamari rings wrapped around a stack of lardons and drizzled in olive oil – simply divine. Jean also does *raciones* (plates) for around €6 to €7.

Le Comptoir du Foie Gras/Maison Pujol (1 rue du Centre; tapas €1) This quirky place morphs from a shop selling jars of outstanding foie gras in the day to a tapas bar in the evening. Needless to say the tapas are foie gras heavy, but they also have more vegetarian-suitable options such as those made with guacamole. It's so small that you'll probably end up standing outside shouting your order through the bar window.

Bar Basque (1 rue du Port Vieux; tapas €1.20-7) This rustic-chic newcomer serves bite-size Basque tapas washed down with a fantastic selection of wines.

La Santa María (Plage du Port Vieux; tapas plate €12; ☹closed Nov-Easter & Wed low season) This place, balanced haphazardly on the rocks at the far end of our favourite Biarritz beach, the cute Plage du Port Vieux, is a fantastic place for a sunset drink and a plate of tapas (€12), but sadly they know the positioning is worth gold and so they charge likewise!

rainbow of colours and styles (customised with ribbons and laces while you wait). A pair starts from €10.

Robert Pariès CHOCOLATES
(1 place Bellevue) Test your willpower with scrumptious chocolates and Basque sweets.

i Information

Form@tic (15 av de la Marne; per 15min €1.20; ☹9am-noon & 2-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-noon & 2-6pm Sat) Bright, stylish internet café with full facilities.

Post office (rue de la Poste)

Tourist office (☎05 59 22 37 00; www.biarritz.fr; square d'Ixelles; ☹9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun) In July and August there are tourist-office annexes at the airport, train station and at the roundabout just off the Biarritz *sortie* (exit) 4 from the A63.

i Getting There & Away

AIR To reach Biarritz-Anglet-Bayonne airport (p641), take STAB bus 6 or, on Sunday, line C to/from Biarritz' *hôtel de ville*. Each runs once or twice hourly, from 7am to about 7pm.

BUS Buses run frequently between Bayonne (p641) and Biarritz; they work out much cheaper than taking the train as you'll pay the same to get from Biarritz' train station to its town centre

as you will to get from Bayonne to Biarritz directly on the bus.

Ten daily **ATCRB buses** (www.transdev-atcrb.com) travel down the coast to St-Jean de Luz (€20) from the stop just near the tourist office beside square d'Ixelles. Buses to Spain (p641) also pick up passengers here.

TRAIN Biarritz-La Négresse train station is about 3km south of the town centre; walking to the centre isn't advised due to busy roads without footpaths, so catch buses 2 or 9 (B and C on Sundays). **SNCF** (13 av du Maréchal Foch; ☹Mon-Fri) has a town-centre office. Times, fares and destinations are much the same as Bayonne's (p641), a nine-minute train journey away.

i Getting Around

BUS Most services stop beside the Hôtel de Ville, from where routes 1 and 2 (€1.20, about 50 daily) go to Bayonne's Hôtel de Ville and station. **STAB** has an information kiosk adjacent to the tourist office.

TAXI Call **Atlantic Taxis** (☎05 59 23 18 18).

St-Jean de Luz & Ciboure

POP 13,600

If you're searching for the quintessential Basque seaside town – with atmospheric narrow streets and a lively fishing port pull-

ing in large catches of sardines, tuna and anchovies that are cooked up at authentic restaurants – you've found it.

St-Jean de Luz, 24km southwest of Bayonne, sits at the mouth of the River Nivelle and is overlooked by the lush Pyrenean foothills. The town and its long beach are on the eastern side of Baie de St-Jean de Luz.

Its sleepy, smaller alter ego, Ciboure, is on the western curve of the bay, separated from St-Jean de Luz by the fishing harbour.

Getting between St-Jean de Luz and Ciboure couldn't be easier. You can cross over the Pont Charles de Gaulle on foot or by car. Or, a more fun alternative, take one of the summer ferries that cross the harbour between the two (see p654).

Sights

A superb panorama of the town unfolds from the promontory of **Pointe Ste-Barbe**, at the northern end of the Baie de St-Jean de Luz and about 1km beyond the town beach. Go to the end of bd Thiers and keep walking.

Beaches

BEACHES

St-Jean de Luz' beautiful banana-shaped sandy beach sprouts stripy bathing tents from June to September. Ciboure has its own modest beach, **Plage de Socoa**, 2km west of Socoa on the corniche (the D912); it's served by ATCRB buses en route to Hendaye and, in the high season, by boats. Both beaches are protected from the wrath of the Atlantic by breakwaters and jetties, and are among the few child-friendly beaches in the Basque Country.

Churches

CHURCHES

The plain facade of France's largest and finest Basque church, **Église St-Jean Baptiste** (rue Gambetta; ☉8.30am-noon & 2-7pm), conceals a splendid interior with a magnificent baroque altarpiece. It was in front of this very altarpiece that Louis XIV and Maria Teresa, daughter of King Philip IV of Spain, were married in 1660. After exchanging rings, the couple walked down the aisle and out of the south door, which was then sealed to commemorate peace between the two nations after 24 years of hostilities. You can still see its outline, opposite 20 rue Gambetta.

In Ciboure, the 17th-century **Église St-Vincent** (rue Pocalette) has an octagonal bell tower topped by an unusual three-tiered wooden roof. Inside, the lavish use of wood and tiered galleries is typically Basque. The

church is just off the main seafront road quai Maurice Ravel.

Maison Louis XIV

HISTORICAL BUILDING

(www.maison-louis-xiv.fr, in French; adult/child €5.50/3; ☉10.30am-12.30pm & 2.30-6.30pm, closed Tue & mid-Oct-Easter) Sitting on a pretty, pedestrianised square is the so-called Maison Louis XIV. Built in 1643 by a wealthy shipowner and furnished in period style, this is where Louis XIV lived out his last days of bachelorhood before marrying Maria Teresa. See the website for details of half-hour guided tours (with English text).

Alongside, and rather dwarfed by its more imposing neighbour, is St-Jean de Luz' **Hôtel de Ville**, built in 1657.

Socoa

OLD TOWN

The heart of Socoa is about 2.5km west of Ciboure along the continuation of quai Maurice Ravel (named for the *Boléro* composer, who was born in Ciboure in 1875). Its prominent **fort** was built in 1627 and later improved by Vauban (see p944). You can walk out to the Digue de Socoa breakwater or climb to the **lighthouse** via rue du Phare, then out along rue du Sémaphore for fabulous coastal views.

Écomusée Basque

MUSEUM

(adult/child €5.50/2.30; ☉10am-6.30pm, closed Nov-Mar) Around 2km north of St-Jean de Luz beside the N10, Basque traditions are brought to life on one-hour audioguide tours of this illuminating multimedia museum, which has three entire rooms devoted to Izarra (Basque for 'star'), a liqueur made from 20 different local plants.

Maison de l'Infante

HISTORICAL BUILDING

(quai de l'Infante; adult/child €2.50/free; ☉11am-12.30pm & 2.30-6.30pm Tue-Sat, closed mid-Oct-May) In the days before her marriage, Maria Teresa stayed in this mansion (like the temporary home of her husband to be, it was owned by a shipowner), the brick-and-stone Maison Joanoenia, off place Louis XIV, which has fine architectural detail.



Activities

Opportunities to get out on, in and under the water abound. With a decent swell (rare in the summer), good surf can be found 5.5km north of town at **Plage de Lafitenia**, which has a long but slow right point break.

Odysée Bleue

DIVING SCHOOL

(www.odyssee-bleue.com, in French; hangar 4, chemin des Blocs) Join a diving school in



(<http://espacevoile.free.fr>, in French) Windsurfing lessons and yachting courses in Socoa.

(www.nivelle3.sextan.com, in French) From May to mid-September, a boat leaves quai du Maréchal Leclerc for morning deep-sea fishing trips (€30) and afternoon cruises (€15). Despite the name, the boat currently in use is actually the *Nivelle V*.

St-Jean de Luz

Top Sights

Église St-Jean Baptiste.....	B3
Maison Louis XIV.....	B4
St-Jean Plage.....	B2

Sights

- 1 Hôtel de Ville..... A4
- 2 Maison de l'Infante..... A4

Activities, Courses & Tours

- 3 Nivelle Trois..... B4
- 4 Youkoulélé (H2O Surf School)..... D2

Sleeping

- 5 Hôtel Les Almadies..... C2
- 6 Hôtel Ohartzia..... B2
- 7 La Devinière..... D2
- 8 Zazpi..... D1

Eating

- 9 Buvette des Halles..... C3
- 10 Covered Market..... C3
- 11 Grillerie du Port..... B4
- 12 Le Peita..... B3
- 13 Olatua..... D1
- 14 Pilpil-Enea..... D3

Drinking

- 15 La Taverne de Nesle..... C4
- 16 Pub du Corsaire..... A3

Shopping

- 17 Macarons Adam..... C2
- 18 Macarons Adam..... B3
- 19 Maison Charles
Larre..... B3
- 20 Sandales Concha..... B3



Festivals & Events

Fêtes de la St-Jean

CULTURAL FESTIVAL

Bonfires, music and dancing take place on the weekend nearest 24 June.

Régates de Trainières

BOAT RACES

A weekend of boat races on the first weekend in July.

La Fête du Thon

FOOD FESTIVAL

The Tuna Festival, on another July weekend, fills the streets with brass bands, Basque music and dancing, while stalls sell sizzling tuna steaks.

Danses des Sept Provinces Basques

DANCE FESTIVAL

Folk dancers from across the Spanish and French Basque Country meet in early summer.

La Nuit de la Sardine

CULTURAL FESTIVAL

The Night of the Sardine – a night of music, folklore and dancing – is held twice each summer on a Saturday in early July and the Saturday nearest 15 August.



Sleeping

July to mid-September are packed and advance reservations are essential; low-season prices can drop significantly. There are a couple of cheap and cheerful places opposite the train station.

Between St-Jean de Luz and Guéthary, 7km northeast up the coast, are no fewer than 16 camping grounds. ATCRB's Biarritz and Bayonne buses stop within 1km of them all.



La Devinière

BOUTIQUE HOTEL €€

(☎05 59 26 05 51; www.hotel-la-deviniere.com; 5 rue Loquin; r with street/garden view €120/160; ♿) You have to love a place that forsakes TVs for antiquarian books (room 11 even has its own mini-library). Beyond the living room, with its piano and comfy armchairs, there's a delightful small patio equipped with lounges. It's a truly charming place that feels like a little old country cottage that has somehow been sucked into the town centre. The rooms are stuffed full of antique furnishings including old writing desks. It's worth paying the extra for the garden-facing rooms, which have little balconies overlooking the riot of vegetation down below. Breakfast is €12.

Zazpi

DESIGN HOTEL €€€

(☎05 59 26 07 77; www.zazpihotel.com; 21 bd Thiers; r/ste from €205/400; ♿) Seriously hip, this wonderful old mansion-turned-designer-hotel is one of the most stylish hotels in southwest France. Staying here is like living in a very glamorous interior design magazine. There's a rooftop terrace complete with pool and sensational views over an ocean of terracotta roof tiles to the fairy-tale green Basque hills. It's fronted by a snazzy bar with lime and olive modular sofas and a tearoom (open 11am to 8pm) serving soups, salads and pastas. Breakfast is a pricey €16. It's wheelchair accessible.



Hôtel Les Goëlands

BOUTIQUE HOTEL €€

(☎05 59 26 10 05; www.hotel-lesgoelands.com; 4 & 6 av d'Etcheverry; s/d from €60/79;

🏠) Accommodation devoted to ecological principles is still a rarity in the French Basque Country, but this place goes all out with a forward-looking recycling and energy-saving policy. The owners haven't skimped on the rooms either – they're large, sunny and comfortable, and look down onto the nicest hotel gardens in St-Jean de Luz, where you can eat your breakfast and lounge about in the sun. They also rent electric bikes to guests and cook meals made from fresh local produce (half board is obligatory in July and August).

Hôtel Ohartzia

BOUTIQUE HOTEL €€

(☎05 59 26 00 06; www.hotel-ohartzia.com, in French; 28 rue Garat; r with shower/bath €79/89;

🏠) Framed by cobalt-blue shutters, this flower-bedecked Basque house is just a few steps from the beach. Immaculate rooms are well furnished and equipped, and the welcome's friendly. The highlight is its hidden foliage-shaded garden full of well-placed tables and chairs. A couple of the rooms are outside in this garden. Breakfast is €7.

Hôtel La Caravelle

BOUTIQUE HOTEL €€

(☎05 59 47 18 05; www.hotellacaravelle.com; bd Pierre Benoît; r with street/sea view from €90/110; 🏠) In Ciboure, this nautical-themed place was originally two fishermen's cottages. Seven of its 19 light-filled, modernised rooms have beautiful bay views. Parking costs €10. Breakfast is €8.

CROSS-BORDER ENCOUNTERS: A DAY IN SAN SEBASTIÁN

Spain, and the elegant and lively city of San Sebastián, is now so close it could almost be considered rude not to slip over to see for yourself why people make such a fuss about San Sebastián. Put simply, San Sebastián is stunning. The town is set around two sickle-shaped beaches, at least one of which, Playa de la Concha, is the equal of any city beach in Europe. But there's more to the city than just looks. Cool, svelte and flirtatious, San Sebastián really knows how to have a good time: With more bars per square metre than anywhere else on earth, and more Michelin stars per capita than anywhere else in the world, San Sebastián's CV is pretty damn impressive. But it's not just us who think this. A raft of the world's best chefs, including such luminaries as Catalan superstar chef Ferran Adrià, have said that San Sebastián is quite probably the best place on the entire planet in which to eat!

So, how do I get there then? By car it's just a short 20-minute jump down the A64 (and past an awful lot of toll booths!), or you can endure the N10, which has no tolls but gets so clogged up that it will take you a good couple of hours to travel this short distance. Or hop on a bus or a train. Trains run from St-Jean de Luz to Hendaye (and occasionally onto Irún) roughly hourly (€2.90, 12 minutes), from where you can board one of the frequent Eusko Trens for the ride into San Sebastián (€1.30; 30 minutes). Otherwise, PESA buses run twice daily between the two towns (€4.40, one hour 15 minutes).

And about those tapas? The whole of the old town is crammed with tapas (*pintxo* in Basque) bars, all of which, and we truly mean *all*, have a sublime range of bited-size morsels on offer. However, a couple that really stand out are **Astelena** (Calle de Iñigo 1), in the corner of Plaza de la Constitución, and **La Cuchara de San Telmo** (Calle de 31 de Agosto 28), a hidden-away bar serving such delights as *carrilera de ternera al vino tinto* (calf cheeks in red wine), with meat so tender it starts to dissolve almost before it's past your lips.

And if I want to really splash out? With three Michelin stars, **Arzak** (☎943 27 84 65; Avenida Alcalde Jose Elsegui 273; meals €100-160), run by acclaimed Chef Juan Mari Arzak, takes some beating when it comes to *nueva cocina vasca* (new Basque cuisine). Reservations, well in advance, are obligatory.

And if I want to stay the night? **Pensión Amaior Ostata** (☎943 42 96 54; www.pensionamaior.com; Calle de 31 de Agosto 44; s/d from €45/54) and **Pensión Bellas Artes** (☎943 47 49 05; www.pension-bellasartes.com; Calle de Urbietta 64; s/d from €59/79) are our value-for-money hot tips.

And what is there to do there? What? Other than eating, drinking and playing on the beach?! OK, well, there's fantastic shopping, a superb aquarium, a couple of museums and, well, eating, drinking and playing on the beach.

Hôtel Les Almadies

BOULIQUE HOTEL €€

(☎05 59 85 34 48; www.hotel-les-almadies.com, in French; 58 rue Gambetta; r €110-130; ☺closed Nov; ☎) Four of the seven rooms at this family-run gem open to balconies overlooking St-Jean de Luz' pedestrianised shopping street, and all blend restrained countrified fabrics with contemporary furnishings. The timber-decked breakfast (€12) room opens to a sunny terrace. Parking is €10.

**Eating**

Seafood is the mainstay of restaurant menus and St-Jean de Luz doesn't disappoint in this department – many people come here as much for the food as anything else. Tempting restaurants line rue de la République, rue Tourasse and place Louis XIV.

**Buvette des Halles**

SEAFOOD €

(☎05 59 26 73 59; bd Victor Hugo; dishes €7-14; ☺6am-2pm & dinner) Tucked into a corner of the covered market, this minuscule restaurant serves goat's cheese, Bayonne ham, grilled sardines, fish soup, mussels and much more, outside beneath the plane trees on the small square between June and September. The rest of the year you can eat tucked up inside, but go early for the best pickings.

Grillerie du Port

SEAFOOD €

(☎05 59 51 18 29; quai du Maréchal Leclerc; ☺mid-Jun–mid-Sep) In this old shack by the port, join the crowds gorging on fresh sardines, salads and slabs of tuna steak fresh off the boat. It's informal and economical; prices depend on the day's catch but are always reasonable.

Pilpil-Enea

SEAFOOD €

(☎05 59 51 20 80; 3 rue Sallagoity; lunch mains €10-14, lunch menus €9, dinner menus from €25; ☺closed dinner Tue, Wed & Sun) Strung with fishing nets, this small, simple restaurant decorated in dark timber and blue-and-white checks is set apart from the tourist throng, and is a firm local favourite for its quality cooking based largely on the aquatic world.

Le Peita

SEAFOOD €

(☎05 59 26 86 66; 21 rue Tourasse; mains €14.50-20, menus from €16; ☺Wed–Sun) Dried Espelette chillies and hams hang from the ceiling at this authentic place with crushed-silk tablecloths and friendly owners. For a taste of the local produce on display, order one of the combination plates accompanied by fresh local cheese. There are several other cosy little places on the same street.

Olatua

BRASSERIE €€

(☎05 59 51 05 22; 30 bd Thiers; menus/mains €30/20) This bright brasserie-style restaurant serves market-fresh fare like *coquilles St-Jacques* (scallops) with risotto and a cloudlike chocolate soufflé with pistachio ice cream for dessert. There's also an outside terrace for sunny days.

Self-Catering

There's a food market every Tuesday and Friday morning inside the **covered market** (bd Victor Hugo).

**Drinking & Entertainment****La Taverne de Nesle**

BAR

(5 av Labrousse; ☺5pm-2am, closed Tue Oct-Jun) This neighbourhood Irish-style pub has a DJ every Friday year-round (twice a week in July and August).

Pub du Corsaire

BAR

(16 rue de la République; ☺5pm-2am) Ten of nearly 100 different beers are on draft at this place, which also mixes some mean cocktails.

Sports

In summer frequent *cesta punta* matches take place at **Jaï Alaï Compos Berri** (rte de Bayonne, N10), 1km northeast of the train station. The tourist office can supply times and prices.

**Shopping****Sandales Concha**

SHOES

(2 rue Gambetta) The traditional shoe of the Basque Country is the espadrille and here you can choose from a huge range of locally produced handmade shoes starting from €8.

Macarons Adam

FOOD

(49 rue Gambetta) For something a little more edible, try the wonderful biscuit-like delicacies sold here. Also at 6 rue de la République.

Maison Charles Larre

HOMEWARES

(4 rue de la République) St-Jean de Luz is also a good place to purchase Basque linen.

**Information**

Internet World (7 rue Tourasse; per hr €6; ☺10am-1pm & 2.30-6pm; 10min €1) Friendly internet café with English keyboards (and secondhand English books).

Post office Ciboure (quai Maurice Ravel); St-Jean de Luz (cnr bd Victor Hugo & rue Sallagoity)

Tourist office (☎05 59 26 03 16; www.saint-jean-de-luz.com; 20 bd Victor Hugo; ☀9am-12.30pm & 2.30-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun, extended hours Jul & Aug) Runs an extensive program of French-language tours around the town and across the Spanish border; ask about English-language tours in summer.

i Getting There & Away

BUS Buses run by **ATCRB** (www.transdev-atcrb.com, in French) pass the **Halte Routière** bus stop near the train station on their way north-east to Biarritz (€3, 30 minutes, nine daily) and Bayonne (€3, 40 minutes, nine daily). South-westward, there are around 10 services daily to Hendaye (€1, 35 minutes).

Also passing the Halte Routière is **Transportes Pesa** (p641), serving San Sebastián and Bilbao.

From April to October, **Le Basque Bondissant** (The Leaping Basque; ☎05 59 26 25 87; www.basquebondissant.com, in French) runs buses to La Rhune, including Le Petit Train (adult/child costs €17/12) and the Grottes de Sare (adult/child €10.50/7.50). Buses leave from the Halte Routière.

TRAIN There are frequent trains to Bayonne (€4.50, 25 minutes) via Biarritz (€3, 15 minutes) and to Hendaye (€2.90, 15 minutes), with connections to Spain.

i Getting Around

BOAT The good ship **Le Passeur** plies between quai de l'Infante and Socoa (€2 one way) every half-hour between June and September.

BUS Between June and September, the Navette Intercommunale, run by ATCRB, provides a local daily bus service, with a skeleton service during the rest of the year. From the Halte Routière, take line 2 for Erromardie and the camping grounds north of town, line 4 for Socoa via Ciboure.

CAR Car-rental companies at the train station include **ADA** (www.ada.fr).

TAXI Call ☎05 59 47 38 38.

Around St-Jean de Luz

LA RHUNE

The first mountain of the Pyrenees, the 905m-high, antenna-topped and border-straddling La Rhune ('Larrun' in Basque), 10km south of St-Jean de Luz, has always been considered sacred among Basques, though today people come for the spectacular views rather than religious or cultural reasons. The mountain is best approached from **Col de St-Ignace**, 3km northwest of Sare on the D4 (the St-Jean de Luz road). From here, you can take a fairly strenuous

five-hour (return) hike, or have all the hikers curse you by hopping on **Le Petit Train de la Rhune** (www.rhune.com; single/return adult €14/17, child €7/10; ☀mid-Feb-Nov). This charming little wooden train takes 35 minutes to haul itself up the 4km from col to summit. In July and August departures are every 35 minutes, the rest of the time they leave at 10am and 3pm. Outside high season they knock a few euros off the above prices. Be prepared for a wait of up to an hour in high summer.

GROTTES DE SARE

Who knows what the first inhabitants of the **Grottes de Sare** (www.grottesdesare.fr; adult/child €7/4; ☀10am-7pm), some 20,000 years ago, would make of today's whiz-bang technology including lasers and holograms during sound-and-light shows at these caves. Multilingual 45-minute tours take you through a gaping entrance via narrow passages to a huge central cavern. Follow the D306, 6km south of the village of Sare.

AINHOA

POP 599

'Un des plus jolis villages de la France', says the sign as you enter this, indeed, very pretty village. Only, this being the Basque Country, someone has painted over 'de la France'...

Ainhoa's elongated main street is flanked by imposing 17th-century houses, half-timbered and brightly painted. Look for the rectangular stones set above many of the doors, engraved with the date of construction and the name of the family to whom the house belonged. The fortified church has the Basque trademarks of an internal gallery and an embellished altarpiece.

For a memorable Basque meal, stop at the Michelin-starred **Ithurria** (☎05 59 29 92 11; www.ithurria.com; s €85-105, d €105-120, menus €35-58; 🍷🍷🍷), established by the Isabal family in an old pilgrims' hostel and now run by Maurice Isabal's two sons (one the sommelier, the other the chef). To make a night of it, Ithurria's rainbow-hued rooms and dreamy swimming pool complement the food perfectly.

ESPELETTE

POP 1879

The whitewashed Basque town of Espelette is famous for its dark-red chillies, an integral ingredient in traditional Basque cuisine. So prized is *le piment d'Espelette* that

LOCAL LINGO

According to linguists, Euskara, the Basque language, is unrelated to any other tongue on earth, and is the only tongue in southwest Europe to have withstood the onslaught of Latin and its derivatives.

Basque is spoken by about a million people in Spain and France, nearly all of whom are bilingual. In the French Basque Country, the language is widely spoken in Bayonne and the hilly hinterland. However, while it is an official language in Spain, it isn't recognised as such in France (although some younger children are educated in Basque at primary-school level). The language also has a higher survival rate on the Spanish side.

But you'll still encounter the language here on Basque-language TV stations, and see the occasional sign reading '*Hemen Euskara emaiten dugu*' (Basque spoken here) on shop doors. You'll also see the Basque flag (similar to the UK's but with a red field, a white vertical cross and a green diagonal one) flying throughout the region, as well as another common Basque symbol, the *lauburu* (like a curly four-leaf clover), signifying prosperity, or life and death.

it's been accorded Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée (AOC) status, like fine wine. In autumn you can scarcely see the walls of the houses, strung with rows of chillies drying in the sun. The last weekend in October marks Espelette's **Fête du Piment**, with processions, a formal blessing of the chilli peppers and the ennoblement of a *chevalier du piment* (a knight of the pimiento).

The **tourist office** (☎05 59 93 95 02; www.espelette.fr, in French), within a small stone château, shares its premises with the Hôtel de Ville.

Chillies star on the menu at the renowned **Hôtel Restaurant Euzkadi** (☎05 59 93 91 88; www.hotel-restaurant-euzkadi.com; r from €64, menus €17.50-34; 🍴🍷) in dishes such as *axoa* (tender minced veal simmered with onions and fresh chillies). Its comfortable rooms are a true bargain.

St-Jean Pied de Port

POP 1700

At the foot of the Pyrenees, the walled town of St-Jean Pied de Port, 53km southeast of Bayonne, was for centuries the last stop in France for pilgrims heading south over the Spanish border, a mere 8km away, and on to Santiago de Compostela in western Spain. Today it remains a popular departure point for hikers attempting the pilgrim trail, but there are plenty of shorter hikes and opportunities for mountain biking in the area.

If you're the sort of person who thinks God invented cars so we didn't have to walk, then St-Jean Pied de Port, with its attractive old core sliced through by the River Nive, is still well worth a visit.

St-Jean Pied de Port makes an ideal day trip from Bayonne, particularly on Monday when the market is in full swing. Half the reason for coming here is the scenic journey south of Cambo-les-Bains, as both railway and road (the D918) pass through rocky hills, forests and lush meadows dotted with white farmhouses selling *ardi* ('cheese' in Basque).

Sights & Activities

Old Town

OLD TOWN

The walled old quarter is an attractive place of cobbled streets, geranium-covered balconies and lots of quirky boutiques. Specific sights worth seeking out include the **Église Notre Dame du Bout du Pont**, with foundations as old as the town itself but thoroughly rebuilt in the 17th century. Beyond Porte de Notre Dame is the photogenic **Vieux Pont** (Old Bridge), the town's best-known landmark, from where there's a fine view of whitewashed houses with balconies leaning out above the water. Fishing is forbidden where the River Nive passes through town, and the fat, gulping trout seem to know it. A pleasant 500-metre riverbank stroll upstream leads to the steeply arched **Pont Romain** (meaning Roman Bridge, but in fact dating from the 17th century).

Rue de la Citadelle is edged by substantial, pink-granite 16th- to 18th-century houses. Look for the construction date on door lintels (the oldest we found was 1510). A common motif is the scallop shell, symbol of St Jacques (St James or Santiago) and of the Santiago de Compostela pilgrims. Pilgrims would enter the town through

THE IPARLA RIDGE HIKE

Rising up above St-Étienne de Baïgorry are wave upon wave of luminous-green mountains, including the sheer-sided ridge of **Iparla** (1056m), which marks the border with Spain. A breathtaking one-day hike (4½ hours without stopping and an elevation gain of 900m) along the edge of this ridge is easily possible for any moderately fit walker. Many experienced Pyrenean walkers describe this as the finest ridge walk in the entire mountain range. Do note, however, that this walk should not be attempted in foggy, snowy or wet conditions. You will need a compass and a *Rando Éditions 1:50,000 Pays Basque Ouest* map wouldn't go amiss either (this can be obtained at any local bookshop as well as many newsagents). Children may need a helping hand on some of the earlier parts of this walk (this author last did it in 30-degree heat with a six-month-old baby strapped to his back) but once on the ridge it'll be plain sailing.

The trail begins from the **Bordazar Berroa**, a traditional Basque farmhouse. To get there, leave St-Étienne de Baïgorry northward on the D9418 and after a couple of kilometres take the narrow turn-off to your left towards Urdos and La Bastide. Continue along this for around 3km, past the second turn-off for Urdos and past the hamlet of La Bastide. Just beyond, you'll reach the farmhouse and a parking area where the walk begins.

Walk in a northwest direction along the track signed to Iparla. Fifteen minutes later, at the fork with the concrete track, head right in a due west direction. Ten minutes later, just after a stream and a shepherd's hut, the trail starts to climb steeply. At the next fork, head right in a northeast direction. You now appear to be heading away from the ridge. After another five minutes the path bends around the top of a low ridge and starts to head downhill. There should be a water trough on your left and a dirt trail heading upwards in a northwest direction, back towards Iparla. Follow this dirt trail for around 10 minutes until you get to another shepherd's hut/barn, where you turn right along a narrow track heading north-northwest.

After a quarter of an hour you come to a scree slope and the path, which is marked by the odd rock cairn, zigzags sharply upwards and onto the Iparla Ridge, crossing over a fence on the way (ignore the more obvious trail that continues along the flank of the hill). This is the hardest part of the walk – poles are useful! Fifteen minutes of huffing and puffing, and you emerge onto the **Iparla Ridge** beside an old BF90 marker stone. You are now on a stretch of the **GR10**, a highly demanding 45-day trek along the entire length of the Pyrenees, but for now things get much easier.

Turn left, following the obvious path and the red and white paint slashes of the GR10 in a westerly, uphill direction, sticking all the time to the ridge edge. Almost straight away you will start to be rewarded with what you might think are spectacular views: they're nothing compared to those you'll get in a few minutes when you finally reach the summit of Iparla, which is indicated with a marker post. It goes without saying that you'll rest a while here admiring the incredible views across half the French and Spanish Basque Country, but while you're soaking it all in keep your eyes peeled for the numerous huge griffon vultures and various eagles and hawks which circle in the thermals here.

It's impossible to get lost now. Just dance along the edge of the ridge for around an hour (at one point the trail dips down slightly before rising back up again), following the red and white GR10 paint slashes all the way. Eventually the path drops sharply downhill, off the ridge, in a southwest direction and reaches a signpost marking the Col d'Harrieta.

Leaving the GR10 behind here (which labours upwards again and onto another ridge), turn left (east) and follow the path downhill through the forest. After around 15 minutes you'll reach a fork and a shepherd's hut. Take the left-hand path (the other one leads to Urdos) in a northwest direction towards the Col de Larrarté. The path turns into a concrete road and, ignoring any turn-offs, descends sharply for half an hour until you arrive back at your car.

the **Porte de St-Jacques** on the northern side of town, then, refreshed and probably a little poorer, head for Spain through the **Porte d'Espagne**, south of the river.

Prison des Évêques

MONUMENT

(Bishops' Prison; 41 rue de la Citadelle; adult/under 10yr €3/free; ☎10.30am-9pm) This claustrophobic vaulted cellar gets its history muddled. It served as the town jail from 1795, as a military lock-up in the 19th century, then as a place of internment during WWII for those caught trying to flee to nominally neutral Spain. The lower section dates from the 13th century, when St-Jean Pied de Port was a bishopric of the Avignon papacy; the building above it dates from the 16th century, by which time the bishops were long gone. Inside can be found seasonal exhibitions.

La Citadelle

FORTRESS

From the top of rue de la Citadelle, a rough cobblestone path ascends to the massive citadel itself, from where there's a spectacular panorama of the town and the surrounding hills. Constructed in 1628, the fort was rebuilt around 1680 by military engineers of the Vauban school. Nowadays it serves as a secondary school and is closed to the public.

If you've a head for heights, descend by the steps signed *escalier poterne* (rear stairway). Steep and slippery after rain, they plunge beside the moss-covered ramparts to **Porte de l'Échauguette** (Watchtower Gate).

Walking & Cycling

Escape the summertime crowds by walking or cycling into the Pyrenean foothills, where the loudest sounds you'll hear are cowbells and the wind. Both the GR10 (the trans-Pyrenean long-distance trail running from the Atlantic to the Mediterranean over the course of 45 days) and the GR65 (the Chemin de St-Jacques pilgrim route) pass through town. Outside the summer season, check with the tourist office or hostels for snow reports and possible rerouting, and plan your accommodation ahead as many places on the Spanish side close.

Pick up a copy of the excellent *Le Guide Rando: Pays Basque* (€17.50) from local bookshops, which maps walking excursions (in French). See also the box text on opposite for details of what is arguably the best day hike in the region.

To cycle the easy way while enjoying the best of Nive Valley views, load your bicycle

onto the train in Bayonne – they're carried free – and roll back down the valley from St-Jean Pied de Port. If you find the ride all the way back to the coast daunting, rejoin the train at Pont-Noblia, for example, or Cambo-les-Bains.



Tours

In July and August, the tourist office organises tours of the old town and visits to the citadel in French and Spanish.



Sleeping & Eating

Much of the accommodation is geared towards pilgrims on the long hike to Santiago de Compostela in Galicia, Spain. This sort of accommodation is always very basic; normally it consists of just dorm beds, but it's cheap at around €8 to €10 per person. At many places nonpilgrims (or walkers on the GR10) will be turned away. For less active visitors there are also plenty of comfortable and good-value *gîtes* and *chambres d'hôte*.



Itzalpea

B&B €

(☎05 59 37 03 66; www.maisondhotels-itzalpea.com; 5 place du Trinquet; s €52-55, d €62-78; ☎☎☎) This friendly and cosy *maison d'hôte* has five tastefully renovated rooms (some air-conditioned), all of which differ from one and other and all of which are named after local flowers. It's set above a tearoom serving no fewer than 20 different types of teas.

Maison E Bernat

B&B €€

(☎05 59 37 23 10; www.ebernat.com; 20 rue de la Citadelle; d €78-88, extra person €25; ☎) There are only four bedrooms in this welcoming 17th-century place with thick stone walls, but they're airy, well furnished and meticulously kept, and each has a double and a single bed. There's a great little restaurant on-site, which spills onto a tiny terrace (*menus* start from €19), and the hosts run a program of gourmet-themed weekends (€180).

Central Hôtel

HISTORIC HOTEL €

(☎05 59 37 00 22; 1 place Charles de Gaulle; r €60-71; ☎) Follow the gleaming polished timber staircase up to 12 old-fashioned but disappointingly dull rooms at this eponymously situated hotel. The owners are welcoming and there's an on-site restaurant (*menus* €19.50 to €45) opening to a riverside terrace.

Hôtel Les Pyrénées

HISTORIC HOTEL €€

(☎05 59 37 01 01; www.hotel-les-pyrenees.com; 19 place Charles de Gaulle; r €100-160, apt €185-250;

☼mid-Jan–mid-Nov; 🏠🏠🏠) Some of the large, well-furnished rooms at this one-time coaching inn take in stunning mountain views from balconies, but compared to what's available elsewhere it's a little overpriced.

Camping Municipal Plaza Berri

CAMPGROUND €

(☎05 59 37 11 19; av du Fronton; per adult/tent/car/electricity €2.50/2/2/2.50; ☼Apr–Oct) Beside the river, this smallish campground has ample shade.

Chez Arrambide

GOURMET €€€

(menus €40–100, mains €30–48) This twin-Michelin-starred restaurant, the real reason to stop by Hôtel Les Pyrénées, is where chef Firmin Arrambide does wonders with seasonal market produce, such as pan-fried duck breast with ginger and cinnamon or foie-gras-stuffed hare.

Côté Tarte

CAFÉ €

(☎05 59 49 16 78; 5 rue de la Citadelle; menus €14–16; ☼9am–6pm Mon & Wed–Sat; 🏠) A fresh, contemporary little place – all lined tables and coir carpets – specialising in delicious sweet and savoury tarts, including some unlikely offerings such as a scallop and caviar tart!

Self-Catering

Farmers from the surrounding hills bring fresh produce – chillies and local cheeses and much more – to the town's **Monday market** (place Charles de Gaulle). In high summer a weekly handicraft and food fair is held most Thursdays in the covered market.

Walkers can stock up at the **Champion supermarket** (av du Jai Alai) near the train station.



Entertainment

Year-round, variants of *pelota* (admission €7 to €10), including a bare-handed *pelota* tournament, are played at the *trinquet*, *fronton* municipal and *jai alai* courts. Check schedules at the tourist office.

In high summer traditional Basque music and dancing (think of a very manly group of choir singers crossed with some Morris dancers!) takes place in the *jai alai* court or the church. Again, confirm schedules with the tourist office.



Information

Tourist office (☎05 59 37 03 57; www.pyrenees-basque.com; place Charles de Gaulle; ☼9am–7pm Mon–Sat, 10am–4pm Sun Jul & Aug, 9am–noon & 2–6pm Mon–Sat Sep–Jun)



Getting There & Away

Train is the best option to travel to or from Bayonne (€9, 1¼ hours, up to five daily) since the irregular bus service makes a huge detour (and drops you at the station, rather than the centre of town, despite passing right through it – go figure).

St-Étienne de Baïgorry

The village of St-Étienne de Baïgorry and its outlying hamlets straddle the Vallée de Baïgorry. Tranquillity itself after busy St-Jean Pied de Port, the pretty village is stretched thinly along a branch of the Nive. Like so many Basque settlements, the village has two focal points: the church and the *fronton* (*pelota* court). It makes a good base for hikers tackling the **Iparla Ridge** hike (p656). Even if you're not a hiker you can't fail to be impressed by the area's beauty, so an overnight stay is recommended.



Sleeping & Eating

Hôtel-Restaurant Manechenea

HOTEL €

(☎05 59 37 41 68; d €48, menus from €16) A couple of kilometres to the north in the hamlet of Urdos, this rural hotel has butter-yellow rooms which overlook green fields and a bubbling mountain-fed brook. You can eat some of the denizens of said brook, such as delicious trout, for lunch at the in-house restaurant.

Hôtel-Restaurant Arcé

HOTEL €€

(☎05 59 37 40 14; www.hotel-arce.com; s/d from €85/105, menus from €29, mains €17; 🏠🏠) Back in St-Étienne de Baïgorry, this impressive hotel has a stunning riverside location and spacious rooms with old-style furnishings. To reach the pool you must stroll past the orange trees and cross the river via a little humpback bridge. The in-house restaurant is highly regarded by locals.

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